

ARIZONA TRANSITION OUTCOMES REPORT

PREPARED BY Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center

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Ed O'Leary and Wayne Ball

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BACKGROUND

Meeting the transition service requirements of IDEA remains a priority at the national, State, and local levels. The emphasis on preparing and helping students with disabilities successfully move from school to the adult world is even more evident with the increased emphasis at all levels on accountability, showing improvement, and demonstrating results for students and families.

Providing quality transition services and meeting the transition requirements under IDEA 97 is and remains a priority for the Arizona Department of Education. Arizona schools, like the vast majority of other schools in States across the nation, struggle with meeting the secondary transition requirements and many are found out of compliance when monitored. The Arizona Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services wanted to determine a baseline regarding compliance requirements for transition as well as with which requirements districts were experiencing success. Research in Arizona schools, as reported in a 1999 study *Transition from School to Work and Adult Life Executive Summary*, has shown the following:

- 60 percent indicated less than half of their students had paid employment as a transition component.
- 75 percent indicated fewer than 30 percent of their students were working in the community.
- 100 percent indicated fewer than half of their students were involved in a work situation in the community.
- 41 percent indicated that 25 percent or less of their students had outside agency involvement from the adult providers in their transition planning process.
- Although 86 percent of schools indicated that transition services exist in students' IEPs, only 25 percent indicated the plan was of any quality or value.

Clearly, school personnel in Arizona are experiencing difficulty in meeting the transition requirements of IDEA 97. It is believed that many of the problems are due to educators and others not understanding "what" they must do to meet the requirements as well as not having a clear understanding of "how" to go about implementing the requirements. At the same time, the staff at ADE/ESS also realize that "the best strategy for improving the quality of school programs and postschool outcomes is, unfortunately, the least often used—**carrying out IDEA transition services requirements**" as stated in the *Joint Report of the National Council on Disability and Social Security Administration*, November 1, 2000.

PURPOSE

In order to address the needs of students with disabilities in Arizona schools and help prepare them to successfully reach their postschool outcomes, changes must be made to the current system, but the exact nature and extent of the changes were not clear. The ADE started the Transition Outcomes project in 2001 with 11 Grant Sites. To help identify the precise problems that educators and others are having in meeting the transition requirements, ADE/ESS decided to expand the Transition Outcomes Project process by providing training and conducting a self-assessment with 45 additional schools. This training and self assessment was held in March 2002 with three primary purposes:

- To provide intensive training to school staff on the transition requirements.
- To obtain data directly from student files to determine strengths and the areas in the requirements that need attention.
- To provide ADE/ESS with information for future training, technical assistance, and project expansion or development.

This report will

1. Provide background information on the Transition Outcomes Project in Arizona.
2. Summarize the findings from the self-assessment.
3. Provide suggestions to correct identified problems.

METHOD

Design and Instrumentation

To establish baseline data, the Arizona Transition Outcomes project administered the Transition Requirements Checklist (O'Leary, et.al., 2001) to the initial 11 Grant Sites during Fall 2001 and an additional 45 schools during Spring 2002. The checklist identifies 19 indicators for transition services. All but two of the questions align directly with the transition requirements of IDEA 97. The two questions that are not in the requirements, but felt to be critical and relate directly to the provision of transition services, is item #2, "Did the student attend the IEP meeting," and item # 4, "Will this student need involvement from any outside agency in order to make a successful transition?"

Procedure

Every person who reviewed IEP files received training on transition services and practice using the checklist on several case studies. In the 11 pilot schools, outside or third party reviewers were used in the file reviews. This was followed-up by Department staff conducting their own random reviews of pilot site files to determine and increase reliability of the data. The 45 districts that were trained in the spring brought the designated files and during a three day training, conducted a self-review of their own files. Individuals from the Department of Education, experienced teachers from the pilot sites, and Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center staff were available to answer questions and assist schools with the file reviews.

Results

IEP files of students 14 years of age and older were chosen randomly from student headcount lists at ADE. A total of 667 IEPs of students 14 years of age and older were reviewed in the 56 schools. The following is a summary of the findings for each indicator for all schools. The findings are a composite of all schools and IEPs.

A. Participation in the IEP Meeting

1. Did the Public agency invite the student?
Yes 77% No 23%
2. Did the Student attend the IEP meeting?
Yes 67% No 33%
3. Did the Public agency take steps to ensure that the student's preferences and interests were considered in the development of the IEP?
Yes 72% No 28%
- 4a. Will this student need involvement from any outside agency in order to make a successful transition?
Yes 64% No 28% N/A 7%
- 4b. Did the public agency invite representatives of any other agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services?
Yes 25% No 75%
- 4c. If a representative from any other agency did not attend, did the public agency take other steps to obtain their participation in the planning of any transition services?
Yes 36% No 64%

B. Parent Participation

5. Was parent notice provided?
Yes 91% No 9%
6. Does the parent notice indicate that one of the purposes of the meeting will be the development of a statement of transition service needs or a statement of needed transition services?
Yes 36% No 64%
7. Does the parent notice indicate that the public agency will invite the student?
Yes 69% No 32%
8. Does the parent notice identify (by agency, position, and title) any other agency that will be invited to send a representative?
Yes 18% No 82%
9. Does the parent notice indicate the date, time, and location of the meeting and who will be invited?
Yes 84% No 16%
10. Does the parent notice inform the parents that they can invite other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding their child, including related services personnel, as appropriate?
Yes 43% No 57%

C. Content of the IEP

11. Does the IEP include a statement of current performance related to transition services?
Yes 55% No 45%

D. Statement of Transition Service Needs (STSN)

12. Does the IEP include a statement of transition service needs that specifies the student's course of study that will be meaningful to the student's future and motivate the student to complete his or her education?
Yes 52% No 48%

E. Statement of Needed Transition Services (SNTS)

13. Does the IEP include a statement of needed transition services?
Yes 80% No 20%
14. Does the statement of needed services consider
- | | | |
|---|---------|----------------|
| a. Instruction | Yes 81% | No 19% |
| b. Related Services | Yes 59% | No 41% |
| c. Community experiences | Yes 69% | No 31% |
| d. Development of employment and other postschool adult living objectives | Yes 73% | No 27% |
| e. Daily living skills | N/A 22% | Yes 55% No 23% |
| f. A functional vocational evaluation | N/A 23% | Yes 44% No 33% |
15. Are the activities in the statement of needed transition services presented as a coordinated set of activities?
Yes 33% No 67%
16. Do the activities in the statement of needed transition services promote movement from school to the student's desired postschool goals?
Yes 48% No 52%
17. If appropriate, does the IEP include a statement of the interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages?
Yes 47% No 53%
18. Are the statements of transition service needs and needed transition services reviewed at least annually?
Yes 65% No 21% N/A 13%
19. Does the IEP include a statement that at least one year before the student reaches the age of majority under State law, the student has been informed of the rights under Part B that will transfer to him or her when he or she reaches the age of majority?
Yes 80% No 19% N/A 1%

DISCUSSION

In conducting file reviews using the *Transition Checklist* (O’Leary et.al., 2001) in other States and schools across the country, the findings from the reviews from the 56 schools across Arizona appear to be similar with findings from other States and schools. All of the transition requirements need improvement in all of the States and schools. This is consistent with the Federal monitoring reports of States (Williams & O’Leary, 2001) as well as reports from the National Council on Disability (2000) and the *23rd Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (2001).

For the purpose of this report a scale was developed to identify those requirements where there is “proficiency” (90% –100%), “needs improvement” (50% – 89%), and “needs extensive improvement” (0% – 49%). This is shown in below.

The following is a listing of each requirement and level of need based upon the above scale for all schools in the study.

PROFICIENCY (90% – 100%)

- 91 percent of parents were provided notice (written prior notice) of the IEP meeting.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT (50% – 89%)

- 84 percent of the parent notices indicate the date, time, and location of the meeting and who will be invited.
- 81 percent of the IEPs of students 16 years of age and older considered instruction in the statement of needed transition services.
- 80 percent of the IEPs include a statement that at least one year before the student reaches the age of majority under State law that the student has been informed of the rights under Part B that will transfer to him or her when he or she reaches the age of majority.
- 77 percent of the schools invited the student to the IEP meeting.
- 73 percent of the IEPs of students 16 years of age and older considered development of employment and other postschool adult living objectives.
- 72 percent of the schools took steps to ensure that the student’s preferences and interests were considered in the development of the IEP.
- 69 percent of the parent notices indicate the school will invite the student.
- 69 percent of the IEP’s of students 16 years of age and older considered community experiences.
- 67 percent of the students attended the IEP meeting.
- 65 percent of the statements of transition service needs and needed transition services are reviewed at least annually.
- 59 percent of the IEPs of students 16 years of age and older considered related services.

- 55 percent of the IEPs of students 16 years of age and older considered daily living skills.
- 55 percent of the IEPs included a statement of current performance related to transition services
- 52 percent of the IEPs included a statement of transition service needs that specifies the student's course of study.

NEEDS EXTENSIVE IMPROVEMENT (0% – 49%)

- 48 percent of the activities in the statement of needed transition services promote movement from school to the student's desired postschool goals.
- 47 percent of the IEPs included, when appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities or needed linkages.
- 44 percent of the IEPs of students 16 years of age and older considered a functional vocational evaluation.
- 43 percent of the parent notices indicated that parents could invite other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding their child to the IEP meeting.
- 36 percent of the schools took other steps to involve outside agencies in the student's IEP when a representative from the other agency did not attend.
- 36 percent of the parent notices indicated that one of the purposes of the IEP meeting was transition services.
- 33 percent of the activities in the statement of needed transition services were presented as a coordinated set of activities.
- 25 percent of the public agencies invited a representative from another agency that was likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services.
- 18 percent of the parent notices identified (by agency, position, and title) any other agency that would be invited to send a representative to the IEP meeting.

The composite scores indicate that all of the requirements were being addressed to some degree. Only one of the requirements, "parents were provided notice," was at the "proficiency" level. The majority of the requirements (58%) are in the area of "needs improvement" while 38 percent of the requirements "need extensive improvement."

The Transition Checklist was developed and grouped around three major categories and two sub-categories. The categories and sub-categories are

Participants in the IEP Meeting (Items 1 – 4b)

Parent Participation (Items 5 – 10)

Content of the IEP (Item 11, 18, 17 and 19)

- Statement of Transition service Needs (Item 12)
- Statement of Needed Transition Services (Items 13 – 16)

In looking at the findings based upon the major categories and sub-categories, the findings show that all categories need improvement. The emphasis on needing to improve the transition requirements goes across all categories, and no single category stands out as

needing more attention than another. What appears to be more important in determining the emphasis and expenditure of time and resources (human and fiscal) is better identified in the findings by looking at and responding to each item and what that item relates to in the context of delivering and providing transition services.

The two items below need “extensive improvement” and will need immediate attention. Addressing these items should occur in the context of providing and delivering transition services and will require greater time and expenditure of human and fiscal resources:

1. ***Identification and involvement of outside agencies.*** Item #4a (25%)—invitation of any other agency responsible for providing or paying for transition services Item 4b (36%)—taking other steps to involve outside agencies in the planning of transition services if they did not attend the IEP meeting Item #8 (18%)—notifying parents of other agencies that will be invited to attend the IEP meeting; and Item #17 (47%)—the IEP includes a statement of interagency responsibilities and needed linkage.
2. ***Making the statement of needed transition services a coordinated set of activities that lead toward the student’s desired postschool goals.*** Item #15 (33%)—are the activities in the statement presented as a coordinated set of activities, and Item #16 (48%)—do the activities lead toward the student’s desired postschool goals.

Items that will require “extensive improvement” and should also be addressed include the following:

1. ***Parent Participation and Notice.*** Three of the six items in this area fall under “needs extensive improvement;” Item #6 (36%)—indicate one of the purposes of the IEP meeting is transition services, Item # 8 (18%)—identify on the parent notice other agencies that will be invited to the IEP meeting, and Item #10 (43%)—informing parents that they can invite to the IEP meeting others who have knowledge or special expertise regarding their child.

Items that will “need improvement” and should to be prioritized and responded to based upon time and resources are listed below:

1. ***Involving Students.*** Inviting students to their IEP meetings (77%), putting into place practices that encourage students to attend their IEP meeting (67%), and ensuring that student preferences and interests are considered in the development of their IEP (72%).
2. ***Statement of Transition Service Needs (Course of Study).*** The IEP includes a statement that specifies the student’s course of study that will be meaningful and motivate the student to remain in school (52%).
3. ***Parent Participation and Notice.*** Identifying on the parent notice that the student will be invited to attend their IEP meeting (69%) and indicating the date, time, location and who will be invited to the meeting (84%).
4. ***Current Performance.*** The IEP includes a statement of the current performance of the student related to transition services (55%).

5. ***Statement of Needed Transition Services.*** All areas required under the statement of needed transition services are considered (range from 44% – 81%).
6. ***Annual Review.*** Statements of needed transition services and transition service needs to be reviewed annually (65%).
7. ***Age of Majority.*** At least one year before the age of majority, the student is informed of their rights that will be transferred under Part B (80%).

Only one item was found to be at a proficiency level of 90 percent or above. Efforts to maintain and monitor this level of proficiency will need to be considered.

1. ***Parent Notice.*** Parent notice was provided (91%).

Limitations

This study involved 56 schools in Arizona or about 10 percent of the total 5 public and Charter schools. The schools in this study included public and Charter schools and were representative of schools across the State. While the data is from a sample of 10 percent of the total possible schools, the findings from across the 56 individual schools appeared to be similar.

Every effort was made through training to try and ensure that all individuals understood “what” was required for transition services and “how” transition services should be addressed in the IEP. All reviewers were provided with 1.5 days of training. The training included an extensive discussion of all of the transition requirements and the presentation of several case studies to complete utilizing the Checklist followed by an opportunity to discuss, as a group, their findings and rationale with the trainers’ findings.

There is some concern and there may be some limitations with the reliability of all of the data. After having conducted training and at the time of conducting file reviews with the 11 pilot sites and the 45 additional districts, there were still some questions about definitions and how to rate evidence of the requirements in some IEP by some reviewers. This did not include all reviewers, nor were questions or concerns universal. Most reviewers understood what to do and how to evaluate and determine evidence of the requirement in IEPs. However, it was clear for some reviewers that additional opportunities for practice should occur. While reliability for some of the reviews could be questioned, it is felt that for most reviews, the data and findings are reliable. This was felt to be the situation because the data and findings between schools appeared to be similar.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Arizona has been proactive in conducting an in-depth and objective study of how well they are doing to meet the transition requirements of IDEA. The implementation of the Transition Outcomes Project Model serves as a first step in identifying precisely what requirements are a problem and the extent of the problem. It is also a model that will allow Arizona to work with schools to identify, implement, and field test strategies to address each problem, demonstrate improvement, and show results.

The goal of the ADE is to have all Arizona schools at or near 100 percent on each transition requirement. It is already being demonstrated through the Transition Outcomes Project Pilot Sites that improvements can be made in all of the requirement areas.

It should be kept in mind that as Arizona looks at improving transition services and identifies strategies that will demonstrate results, some of the categories and items may be an easier “fix” than other categories or items. For instance, all of items under the category of “Parent Participation” relate directly with the Parent Notice. Showing improvement for these items and category might be as simple as

- Clarifying and providing staff awareness training, developing bulletins, or providing information on your Web site about what needs to be included on the parent notice.
- Assisting schools in adding language to their Parent Notice so that it is clear to everyone that transition will be discussed at the IEP of every student beginning at age 14,
- Assisting schools in changing their Parent Notice form so that there are clear prompts for teachers and others to document that the transition requirements on the Parent Notice are met.

In order to expand this Project and initiative across all schools, a well thought out plan of implementation, time, and a commitment of additional human and fiscal resources are required.

Based upon the findings from this study, the following are recommendations for consideration:

- Develop comprehensive longitudinal plan of implementation and improvement that will result in expanding the Transition Outcomes Project to more schools across Arizona.
- Evaluate and revise the improvement plan annually to ensure positive results for youth.
- Provide districts incentives for implementing the Transition Outcomes Project, and tie the project into the monitoring and continuous improvement process and efforts in districts across the State.
- Focus efforts and resources toward developing and field testing strategies that demonstrate improvement in the areas identified as “needing extensive improvement.”
- Include and involve representatives from higher education in the Outcomes Project that will result in moving from successful implementation strategies in schools into practices at the pre-service level.
- Develop technical assistance efforts for schools who complete the first phase of the project and demonstrate improvement through final data. This technical assistance should focus these schools on improving the “quality” of transition planning, discussion, and decision making.
- Continue to gather and summarize both baseline and final data in order to make data-based decisions about next-steps.